

Virginia Department of Veterans Services

Report on the Response of the Virginia Department of Veterans Services to the Impact of the Aging of Virginia's Population

February 27, 2015



Executive Summary

The mission of the Virginia Department of Veterans Services is to serve Virginia's veterans, members of the Virginia National Guard, Virginia residents in the Armed Forces Reserves, and their family members by ensuring they receive timely transition, employment and education assistance, benefits, health care and long term care and recognition they have earned through service to our country and Commonwealth.

Older veterans are an integral part of the population we serve as we continue to execute the Governor's and General Assembly's vision of making Virginia the most veteran-friendly state in the nation. The agency is dedicated and committed to providing timely and needed support to the more than 781,000 veterans who call the Commonwealth home. Virginia's national ranking in 2014 is 7th in veteran population (*USDVA, VetPop 2014, Table 6L*). The USDVA forecasts that Virginia will rank 6th in 2018, 5th in 2019, and 4th in 2022.

DVS provides a broad range of services to Virginia's veterans and their families— from assisting with the benefits claims process, to assisting transitioning service members find a path to employability, to facilitating the attainment of educational benefits, to ensuring veterans have access to health care and behavioral health care to providing long-term care for our aging veteran population. Collaboration with other local, federal and state partners is a cornerstone of our efforts. In FY14, the Department of Veterans Services:

- Filed 23,241 disability compensation claims on behalf of Virginia veterans and families, contributing to the recoupment of **\$2.3 billion** in federal compensation and disability payments to our veterans in FFY13.
- Delivered 5,606 discrete supportive services to veterans and their families through the Virginia Wounded Warrior Program.
- Approved 1,122 education and training facilities offering over 9,500 programs for the GI Bill benefit which expanded educational opportunities for veterans using the G.I. Bill. Virginia veterans received more than **\$872 million** in G.I. Bill benefits in FFY13.
- Facilitated the employment of 3,225 Virginia veterans through the Virginia Values Veterans (V3) Program.
- Provided 130,670 patient days of care at the Sitter & Barfoot Veterans Care Center in Richmond and the Virginia Veterans Care Center in Roanoke.
- Performed 1,464 burials at Virginia's three state veterans cemeteries.
- Honored Virginia's fallen by hosting 65,692 visitors at the Virginia War Memorial, a new single-year record.



The examples cited are some of the many ways we serve veterans of all ages. Similar to the trends nationwide, data validates that the needs of older veterans will only grow. The Virginia Department of Veterans Services is actively pursuing avenues to meet these needs through a spectrum of strategies--from our Housing Development Program that is on track to make the Commonwealth the first state to end veteran homelessness, to the legislative efforts to expedite the anticipated construction of two new veterans care centers, which will provide a mixture of nursing care, Alzheimer's/dementia care, and short-term rehabilitation. This Spring we will open a new 40-bed wing at the Sitter & Barfoot Veterans Care Center in Richmond, increasing the facility's capacity from 160 to 200 beds.

Through a strong partnership with the federal U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), our veterans now have 22 new access points for health care via four Federally Qualified Health Centers located throughout the state. Based upon the forecasting data described in this report, we will continue our quest to ensure our Virginia veterans have access to the wide-range of services they need to include long-term health care and affordable, high quality, comprehensive nursing and domiciliary care.



AGENCY DESCRIPTION

To accomplish the mission of the Virginia Department of Veterans Services as described above, the agency has several core service areas. They are as follows:

BENEFITS SERVICES

The Virginia Department of Veterans Services advocates for Virginia veterans and connects them to benefits and services they have earned. Information on current federal, state and local veterans' programs, entitlements and referral services is available in Virginia through a network of 23 benefit service offices. All services are provided free of charge.

VETERANS EDUCATION TRAINING AND EMPLOYMENT (VETE)

The Veterans Education Training and Employment section of the Virginia Department of Veterans Services ensures that every veteran or eligible person has a full and fair opportunity to reach his or her fullest potential through access to the G.I. Bill approved post-secondary educational, training/licensure/certification, entrepreneurial institutions, Virginia Values Veterans (V3) Program certified employers and Virginia Colleges and Universities.

STATE VETERANS CEMETERIES

Virginia's veterans cemeteries provide burial and perpetual care services to veterans and their eligible dependents. The Commonwealth is home to three state veteran cemeteries: the Virginia Veterans Cemetery in Amelia, the Albert G. Horton, Jr. Memorial Veterans Cemetery in Suffolk, and the Southwest Virginia Veterans Cemetery in Dublin.

STATE VETERANS CARE CENTERS

Virginia's veterans care centers provide long-term skilled care, Alzheimer's/dementia care, assisted living services, and short-term rehabilitation to veterans of the armed forces. The Virginia Veterans Care Center in Roanoke is a 240-bed facility adjacent to the Salem VA Medical Center. The Sitter & Barfoot Care Center is a 160 bed facility located adjacent to the McGuire VA Medical Center in Richmond. This facility has a 40-bed addition under construction and is expected to be complete in the Spring of 2015.

VIRGINIA WOUNDED WARRIOR PROGRAM

The Virginia Wounded Warrior Program (VWWP) was established in 2008 in response to the growing need to improve and expand services to our nation's veterans and their family members coping with the impact of deployment, military service, post-traumatic stress, operational stress



and/or traumatic brain injury. VWWP monitors and coordinates the delivery of behavioral health, rehabilitative, and supportive services for Virginia Veterans and their families. The Department for Aging and Rehabilitative Services and the Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Services are legislatively mandated partners of this program.

VIRGINIA WAR MEMORIAL

The Virginia War Memorial in Richmond serves an integral role in supporting the mission of the Virginia Department of Veterans Services. The Memorial honors our fallen heroes by passing their extraordinary stories of sacrifice forward to future generations through many outreach and on-site educational programs. With regular patriotic events, educational seminars for students and teachers, historical museum exhibits, research library, first-person historical documentary videos, customized tours for schools and other groups, and near virtual reality film, *Into Battle*, the Virginia War Memorial is heralded by many as the preeminent state memorial to honor its veterans in the United States.

THE VETERANS SERVICES FOUNDATION (VSF)

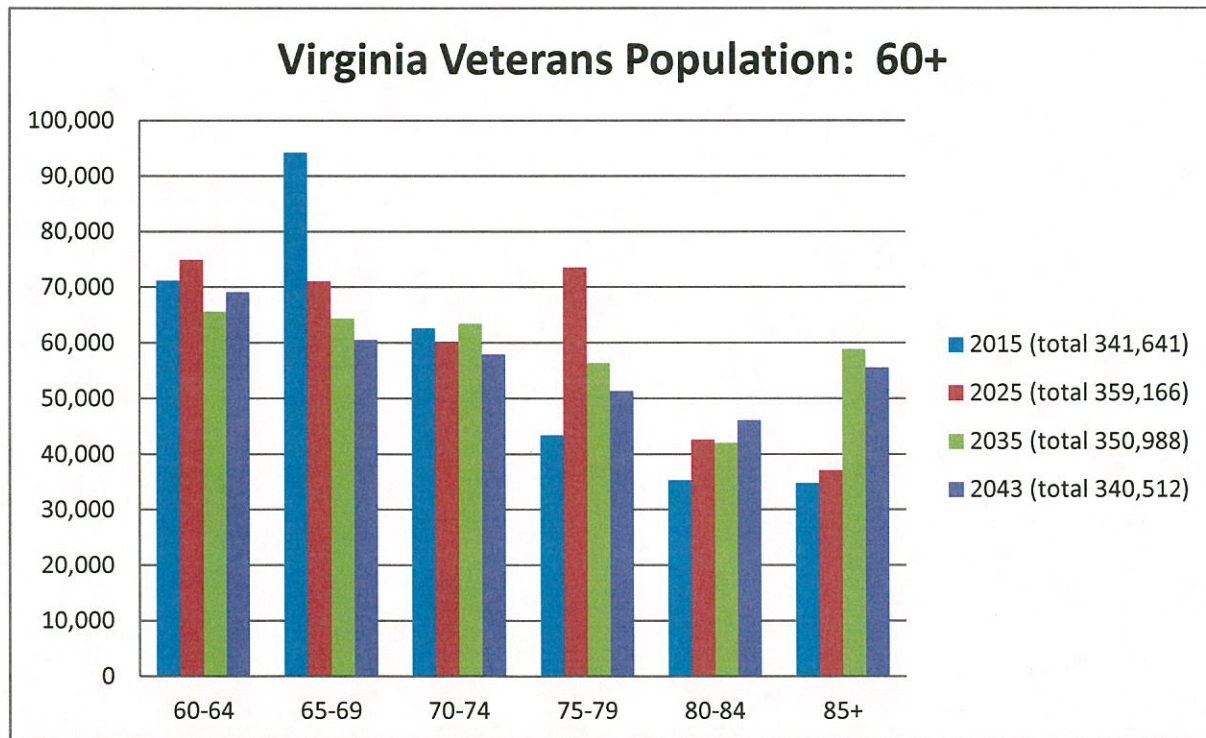
The Veterans Services Foundation is an independent state agency that supports veterans and their families through the Virginia Department of Veterans Services' (DVS) programs and services. The Virginia Veterans Services Foundation accepts donations to support critical programs and services for Virginia's veterans and their families that are not covered by state or federal funds.



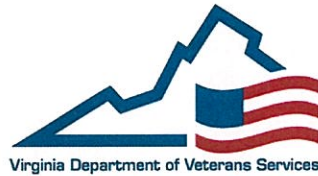
INFORMATION REQUESTED:

The Virginia Department of Veterans Services continually strives to meet the current and projected future needs of our Veteran population. Strategic planning revolves around population data, needs assessments, results of Joint Legislative Audit and Review Commission studies, and experience garnered from direct service delivery over time. The following graphs provide a representation of Virginia's older veteran population and depict that Virginia has the fourth largest population of military retirees.

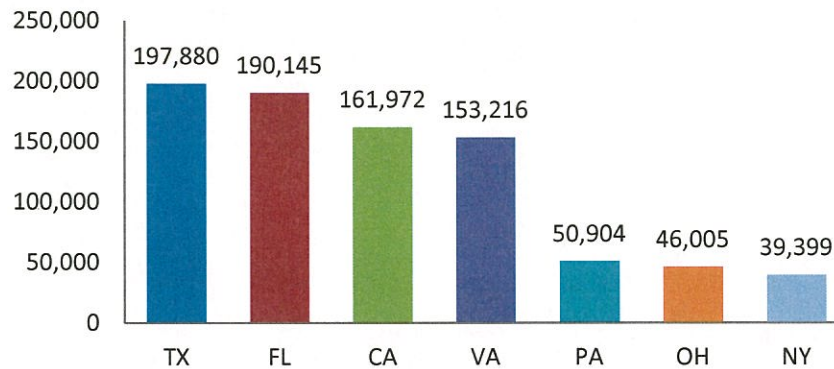
As shown in the first graph, Virginia's older veteran population is forecast to rise through 2025 before beginning a slight decline. The VA forecasts that the number of Virginia veterans aged 60+ will remain relatively stable through 2043, with a forecast difference of only 1,000 veterans between 2015 and 2043. This points to the continued need for the state to serve these veterans, to adopt new programs and services to meet their needs, and to build additional capacity in areas with high populations.



Projected number of veterans age 65+ living in Virginia in 2014 (USDVA, Table 6L). The number of veterans age 60+ will increase annually, peaking at 359,166 in 2025 but remaining above 340,000 through 2043 (USDVA, Table 6L)



Number of Military Retirees, FFY13



DVS enjoys a strong partnership with The Department for Aging and Rehabilitative Services (DARS). The Commissioner of DARS has been an active member of the DVS Interagency Executive Strategy Committee for the last six years and has played an integral role in the Virginia Wounded Warrior Program. As the lead for Brain Injury in Virginia, DARS personnel have participated in a myriad of activities to support our Veteran population to include participation in a statewide team for a Substance Abuse and Mental Health Administration (SAMHSA) Policy Academy that focused on military service members, veterans and their families. DVS has provided letters of support for DARS grant activities and vice versa.

As we continue to serve our aging Veterans, DARS can assist with the continued education to the public regarding the health care services and benefits available to this population. DVS will continue to participate in DARS forums such as the Community Integration Implementation Team as well as the Commonwealth Four-Year Plan for Aging Services Workgroup.

A core service area that provides care primarily (but not limited) to older Veterans are our two Veterans Care Centers. These care centers provide affordable, high quality and comprehensive nursing and domiciliary care. They do not receive any state General Funds for operation; they operate entirely on revenues generated through services provided to residents. Revenue sources include Medicaid, Medicare, per diem payments from the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, and private funding sources.



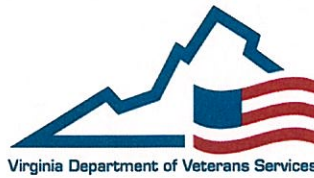
The Virginia Veterans Care Center (VVCC), located adjacent to the Salem Veterans Affairs Medical Center, provides high quality long-term health care for up to 240 veterans. Of the facility's 240 beds, 180 are dedicated to skilled nursing care, including 60 dedicated to the care of Alzheimer's patients. There are 60 beds serving assisted-living (domiciliary care) residents. The VVCC provides on-site physical therapy, occupational and speech therapies as well as many other ancillary health care services. The care center also offers amenities such as a wheelchair accessible nature trail and deck, library, chapel, solariums, and barbershop.

The Sitter & Barfoot Veterans Care Center (SBVCC), located on the campus of the McGuire Veterans Affairs Medical Center (VAMC) in Richmond, features 160 single-occupancy rooms. The care center has two 60-bed skilled nursing care units and one 40-bed Alzheimer's/dementia care unit. The facility provides physical, occupational, and speech therapy, as well as therapeutic recreation, social and spiritual activities, and other amenities such as an on-site pharmacy, a fully equipped barber and beauty shop, activity and game rooms, resident lounges in each nursing unit, courtyards, and an outdoor walking trail. Veterans may be admitted as long-term residents or on a short-term basis for rehabilitation as they transition from hospital care to home.

All beds are certified for both Medicare and Medicaid. The facilities are also certified by the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs.

VVCC works in conjunction with approximately 30 veteran service organizations (VSOs) and more than 120 individual volunteers to hold in-facility and off-site activities for VVCC residents, including two carnivals for residents and their families. Attendance at each of the carnivals averages between 300 and 400 participants. Each year, the VVCC conducts Operation Holiday Spirit (OHS) and raises approximately \$20,000 in donations to purchase holiday gifts for all care center residents. OHS donations also provide funding and equipment for resident activities and special needs.

Twenty-six volunteer groups as well as individuals assist the SBVCC activity department with a variety of programs. Among these volunteers are several groups/classes of active duty soldiers from Fort Lee. In 2014, SBVCC held a wide variety of events and activities for the residents, including horseback riding at the Lonesome Dove Equestrian Center, Richmond Flying Squirrel baseball games, outings to the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts and the Virginia War Memorial, numerous live entertainment performances at the facility, and shopping trips.



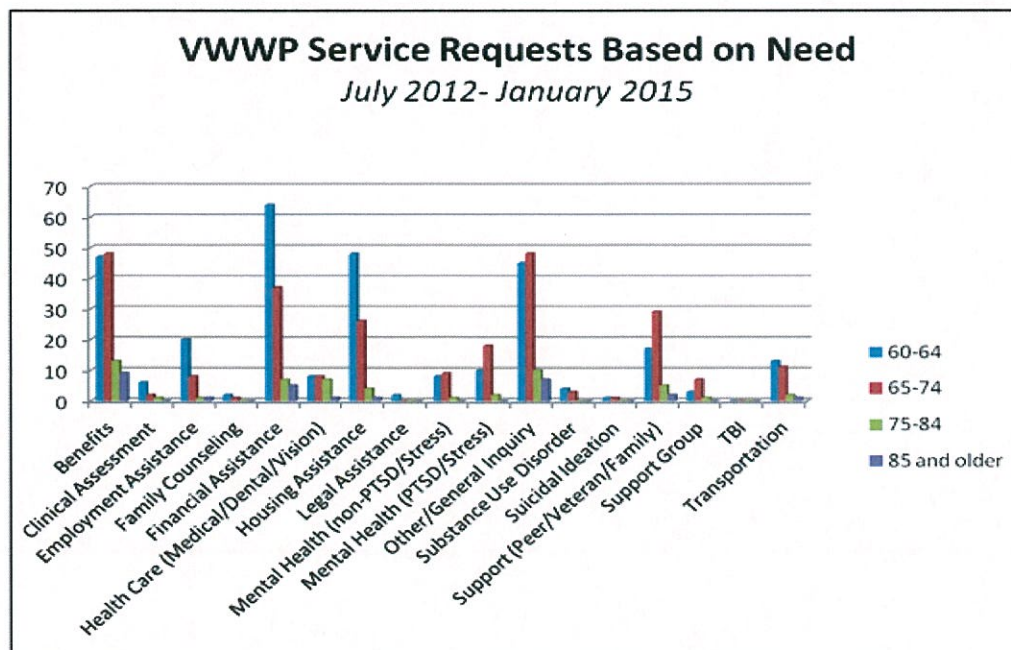
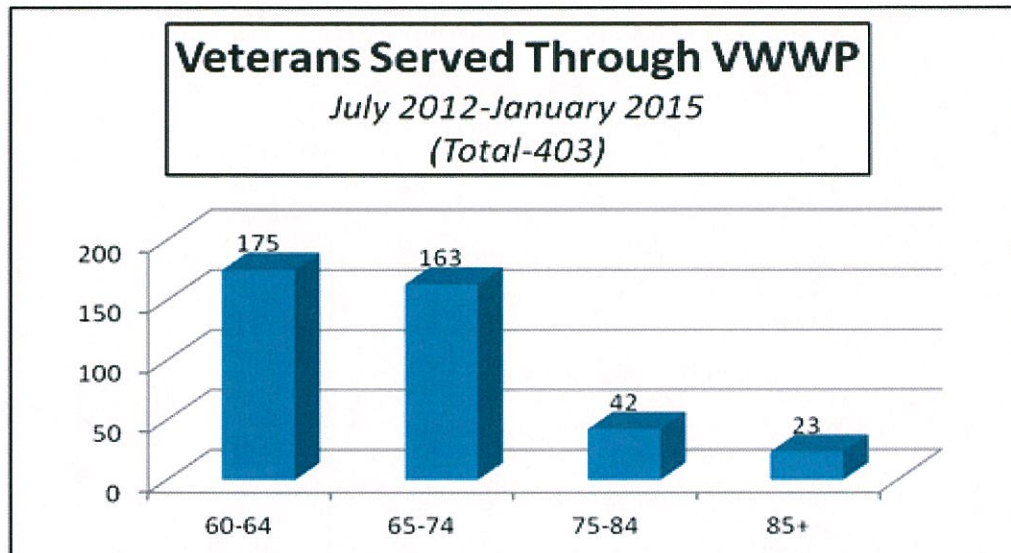
Annual Services Provided	FY12	FY13	FY14
<i>Virginia Veterans Care Center</i>			
Patient Days—Nursing / % of beds occupied	62,093 / 95%	59,078 / 90%	58,555 / 89%
Patient Days—Assisted Living / % of beds occupied	16,717 / 76%	16,156 / 74%	15,959 / 73%
<i>Sitter & Barfoot Veterans Care Center</i>			
Patient Days—Nursing / % of beds occupied	53,333 / 95%	56,786 / 97%	56,045 / 96%

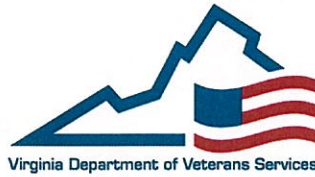
With the 7th largest population of veterans of any state, and only one of two states in the nation whose veteran population is projected to increase over the next five years (Wyoming being the other), the need to be prepared to care for our veterans with long term health care and affordable, high quality, comprehensive nursing and domiciliary care will only increase. While open to veterans from across the state, VVCC and SBVCC residents are drawn primarily from within a 50-mile radius of each facility. This leaves large service gaps in areas of the state with large veteran populations – namely Hampton Roads and Northern Virginia.

To fill this gap in coverage, the Department of Veterans Services has submitted grant requests to the VA for federal matching funds to construct new veterans care centers in these parts of the Commonwealth. New veterans care centers are constructed using a mix of state funding (at least 35% of project costs) and federal funding (up to 65% of project costs). Project costs include design and construction, but not land acquisition, which is a state responsibility. Virginia has committed to funding at least 35% of project costs, and DVS is actively engaged with state and local leaders to select a site for each new care center.



Another core service area is the Virginia Wounded Warrior Program. From July 2012 – January 2015, the Virginia Wounded Warrior Program served 403 veterans over the age of 60. The majority of veterans served were from the Vietnam era and between ages of 60-74. Ninety-two percent of service requests were provided to males and consisted of financial and housing assistance, accessing benefits, and overall peer support.





From a Veterans Benefits perspective, the changing veteran population significantly impacts the services we provide. Currently, a large portion, in some cases up to 80%, of our veteran client base in the southwest part of the state (namely Danville, Bristol, Big Stone Gap and Cedar Bluff) is over the age of 60. Many have existing VA rated disabilities. Many more have no rated disabilities, but qualify for an income-based VA pension. As such, the majority of the services we provide in this part of the state relate to existing claims, rather than new ones, and initial claims for VA pensions. Fewer younger veterans are returning to the western part of the state, as jobs are scarce. Because of this, our veteran population in these areas is getting older and dying off. Inevitably, this causes us to evaluate the future location/existence of some of our offices in the southwest corner of the state, which might result in a reduction in offices. We currently have appropriate resources to meet our senior veteran population in the south and western parts of the state.

At the same time, our veteran population in NOVA, in the Tidewater region, and down the I-95 corridor is growing. This population has many older veterans, but many younger veterans as well. As such, our Benefits offices in these areas prepare a significantly higher number of new and existing claims than those in the west. Unlike in the west, pension claims are rare. Because the veteran demographic in this region is younger and getting younger, the assistance they need from our offices is greater than in other parts of the Commonwealth. Currently, Benefits does not have adequate resources to meet the growing veteran population in the area, but plan to increase the number of Veteran Service Representatives and offices in the near future. If this veteran population remains in the eastern part of the state, we will eventually need to shift resources from the west to the east to meet the growing demand.

DVS is also home to the State Approving Agency (SAA) for Veterans Education and Training. SAA approves educational courses and programs of instruction provided by Virginia institutions to enable eligible veterans and their dependents to enroll and receive financial assistance (GI Bill benefits) from the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (USDVA).

Virginia is ranked 4th among the 50 states and Puerto Rico in terms of veterans using their GI Bill benefits in Federal FY13. Over \$872M of GI Bill benefits were paid to Virginia recipients during this timeframe and 1,122 education and training facilities were approved to provide training to veterans and their dependents. The breakout of veterans over the age of 60 using their benefits in Virginia or the number of those who have passed their benefits on to their dependents are unknown at the time of this report.

Information on our agency services is available in a multitude of venues, however, this is an area we are constantly trying to improve. To that end, DVS has created a senior-friendly and

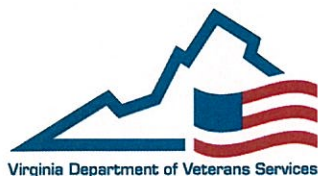


customer oriented website and APP. We also have a presence on Facebook and Twitter. Our Care Center information is available in free community publications such as "Senior Living" magazine. SBVCC even distributes brochures on their facility in various doctor's offices, clinics, and emergency rooms. The Virginia Wounded Warrior Program recently partnered with Senior Navigator staff to develop a Veteran-specific information source. Core service areas have brochures and other informational items that are distributed in a myriad of venues.

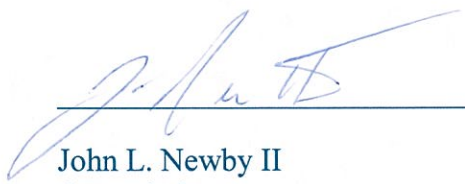
Our Virginia Values Veterans program helps to educate employers on how to hire, train and retain veterans. This program is open to all veterans seeking employment. Our Veterans Transition Assistance Program assists veterans who are leaving military service to integrate into the civilian sector. While most veterans exiting the military are younger than 60 years of age these services are available to our seasoned Veterans as well.

DVS has a large number of individuals who support our agency (board members or volunteers) that are over the age of 60. Succession planning in those instances is an area of focus. In the workplace, however, accommodations for an age related or special need is made on a case-by-case basis and there are no significant trends to report in delayed retirements.

SIGNATURE PAGE



Pursuant to the Code of Virginia §§ 2.2-5510 and 51.5-136, the Virginia Department of Veterans Services submits this report of its progress in addressing the impact of the aging of Virginia's population.



John L. Newby II
Commissioner

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